THE SHANG OR YIN DYNASTY

In the Shang (or Yin) dynasty we have begun to emerge on fairly firm ground. About three-fourths of the names of the rulers of this line, as given in the older Chinese histories, have been, as we have suggested, confirmed by inscriptions on the "oracle bones/' used for divination, discovered in Honan — on the "Waste of Yin/' the site of a capital of the dynasty — at the close of the last century. It seems probable that the complete list of Shang monarchs was preserved through the ancestral observances of later rulers of a feudal principality who claimed descent from them. The sequence of the main series of Shang rulers is fairly well established. Accurate dates are still largely unobtainable. The ones often given for the beginning and end of the dynasty are B.C. 1766-1122, but the first of these is undependable. The dynasty probably took its rise sometime between the seventeenth and the thirteenth century before Christ.[2]

The culture of the Shang was already fairly far advanced. So far as we know, it was indigenous and not an importation. It was a system of writing by means of the predecessors of the present characters. Writing was on ivory or bronze, or — for purposes of divination — incised or scratched on bones and tortoise shells. It is possible, too, that slips of bamboo were already, as in later centuries, written on by means of ink or a kind of varnish. Indeed, it is certain that a brush was employed for writing. The shells of the cowry were used for money. Society was based upon agriculture, and was probably aristocratic, with a sharp division between the lower and upper classes. The patriarchal family was prominent, although matriarchy possibly had existed in more remote

times.^At the head of the state was, the *Wang.* The succession went from older to younger brother, or, failing a younger brother from father to son. The *Wang's* duties were both religioujf and .civil. There were many officials. Religion, as later, was a - „ factor.

There were numerous domesticated animals — among them cattle, the sheep, the pig, the horse, the dog, and fowls. Tigers, bears,, and wolves were still to be found, and were hunted. Great solici-

[2] Current Chinese scholarship leans toward the sixteenth century, with the seventeenth as a possibility.